

How Was the Mate Murdered on Board the Ingersoll?

By **FREDERICK B. WILLIAMS,**
Author of "ON MANY SEAS."

I HAD been putting a few questions to some loafers at the foot of West Twenty-ninth street as to the true version of the story of the murder of the mate of the Justine Ingersoll, which is lying at the wharf there, when my arm was quietly taken by some one. Turning, I found my friend Matthew Hampton, who spends his time, at some one else's expense, in providing moral literature for "Poor Jack." Now, Jack's thirst is of a kind which only too often calls for draughts of a less divine nature than those which are tapped in a seaman's mislaid house, and having been both before and abate the mast myself, I became interested in Hampton's tirade on the cowardly treatment of the men by their officers.

Hampton backed his remarks with that assurance which can only be assumed by the professional missionary. "You know," he said, "I come in contact with a great many sailors in the performance of my duties." I see them on board their ships, and in their boarding houses. I have talked with a great many of them, and am satisfied that they are the most abused class of men on this footstool. It is the greatest wonder to me that there are not more brutal mates and captains murdered than there are. I tell you, it's my opinion that if sailors were not gifted with the utmost forbearance, few ships—American ships, at any rate—would bring home their full complement of officers, and I, for one, could hardly feel sorry for them."

"Did you ever talk with any of these brutal mates?" I asked him.

"N—o—o, everybody knows what they are," he said.

As I gazed into the eyes of the misguided philanthropist, memory winged a swift backward flight, and I asked him if he could spare me a half hour. He said he could. We found a convenient cafe, and I told my missionary friend the following tale of one of the saddest episodes of my life at sea, and which illustrates, by a very close resemblance, the details of the murder of the mate of the Justine Ingersoll.

I shipped as second mate of the Nevada in 1893, in the port of Cardiff, Wales. She was an old ship, had been in the "Frisco" trade, and when the extreme clippers came

in vogue she was degraded to a New Orleans cotton wagon, picking up whatever transient freight she could get between the seasons. So it came about that she was then in Cardiff, bound for Rio, with a cargo of Welsh coal. This was by no means a desirable voyage, but I had been ashore long enough, and, as was my usual custom, I took the first ship that offered. I went aboard three days before sailing time to help the mate, Mr. Weldon, get in the stores, superintend the rigging's agone bending sails, etc.

My ideas of discipline were somewhat shocked by the cordial manner in which Mr. Weldon greeted me, for I conceived that no good could come of such freedom from a chief to a second mate, as that with which he treated me. Now that my head is gray and I have found how much less I know than I then thought I did, I am free to admit that I learned to like Frank Weldon as few men like another.

Although she was a large ship for those days, 1,500 tons register, Captain Joshua Farrington, who had sailed her for years and knew just what she could do, shipped a light crew in Cardiff on the plea of hard times and low freights. There were ten men forward, and Frank and I aft. The crew were of the usual sort picked up in the Welsh coal ports. They were mostly natives of the Mediterranean ports, French, Spanish, Maltese, Italians and Greeks, known to American sailors by the generic name of "Dago." They all look and act about alike, so that the political division from which they hail as a matter of no consequence.

They were a beautiful set, and when I saw them I expected to have trouble, but Mr. Weldon had warned me beforehand that Captain Farrington wanted a quiet ship—although he was said to have been a "bummer" himself once. By their cat-like agility and evident hearty good will they obviated the necessity for driving, so our sailing was as uneventful as the starting of a ferryboat—a method of leaving port that was highly unsatisfactory to an ambitious young second mate like myself, who liked a bit of bustle.

We soon found that in spite of their unprepossessing appearance they were a fairly good crew, and although they were a low-browed, villainous-looking set, especially when conversing among themselves, yet

they responded with alacrity to orders and never failed to show proper respect, with one exception. This was a fellow by the name of Pepe, who fell to the mate's watch. We had not been out a week when Mr. Weldon, or Frank—we were already Frank and Fred to each other—began to have a feeling of uneasiness on Pepe's account.

He would remain on deck sometimes half an hour after he should have been below, telling me that he expected to have trouble with the men sooner or later. He said that while he couldn't really say that the fellow was insolent, yet he had a surly, half-defiant way which was extremely irritating. He could speak but a few words of English, and it was just possible that he hadn't been civilized enough yet to know what was due from him to his superior officer.

There being but three of us aft, and one an old man, to keep the ten of them in subjection, it was of vital importance to check permanently the first symptom of insubordination. Still, it was desirable to avoid trying conclusions with them if possible, for besides the captain's desire for a quiet ship, we could ourselves see that every man jack of them was a born athlete. Short of stature and square of build, the knotted muscles stood out on their bare arms and thick hairy necks like tangled ropes, and yet, as I have said, they were agile as cats.

I asked Frank to trade Pepe into my watch, but he only laughed. "No, no. The fellow might think he had frightened me," he said, "and I wouldn't have him think that for anything. I dare say I'm a fool. Probably he doesn't mean anything, but he irritates me by his manner. When I speak to him he glances up at me sideways out of those sneaky black eyes of his, and if he answers at all it's with a kind of half-intelligible grunt, and then he slouches off as though he had half a mind not to go at all. I sometimes think that his actions or my disregard of them are having a bad effect on the rest of the watch. They don't seem to be so quick and hearty as they were. But maybe it's all my imagination."

I told him that if he thought any of them were trying to impose on him he ought to have it out with them at once. I offered to stay on deck with him and lend a hand if necessary, but he laughed at the idea, saying if those Dagoes forced him to get after

them they would have more fun than a boy killing snakes.

One morning Frank told me that he had had an understanding with Pepe. When washing decks that morning Pepe was passing the buckets to him, and Frank told him to hurry a bit and not be all day getting the water along. Pepe scowled, muttered something to himself, and passed the water. If anything, slower than before. Frank let him go for a few minutes until the whole watch were in close proximity to the pair of them, when, seizing Pepe by the collar, he gave him a shake, saying, "What's the matter with you, hey?"

"Was er matter er you?" said Pepe savagely. With that Frank dropped the heavy bucket, full of water, on Pepe's bare foot, and, grabbing him by the shoulders, rushed him to the rail, saying: "I've had my eye on you ever since you came aboard, and now I want you to understand that you've got to move lively when I speak to you, and when you speak to me say 'sir,' or you'll get yourself into trouble, do you hear?"

The rest of the watch gathered round the two men, chattering like so many Cape pigeons round a bit of pork rind, some talking to Pepe and some telling Frank that "Pepe he no unnerstan."

"Well, then, some of you that do understand tell him what I say."

"Yes, yes, Meester Veldon, me tell. He unnerstan now. Him say he no do no mo'."

"All right," said Frank cheerily. "Now, then, get along with your scrubbing again, men. Come, Pepe, give me some water."

THE INGERSOLL TRAGEDY.

Paul Blanchard, an able seaman, is under arrest at Norfolk, Va., accused of the murder of Chief Mate John Christian, of the American bark John H. Ingersoll. There is much mystery surrounding the case. The mate disappeared on December 27, when the vessel was near the Bermudas, on a trip to Montevideo. Christian, from all accounts, was a thoroughly brutal in the treatment of the sailors under him. Blanchard was the especial object of his malice. A seaman named Nicol claims that Blanchard killed his mate by beating him over the head with a belaying pin. He then forced Nicol to assist him in throwing the body into the sea.

Blanchard was placed in irons and confined in the ship's lazaret for forty-five days during the trip to Montevideo and return. The Ingersoll is lying at the foot of West Twenty-ninth street. The accompanying illustrations show the impossibility of Nicol, the informer, who was at the wheel, to have seen the murder. The scene of the attempt of the murdered mate's brother, who was second mate of the vessel, to avenge the crime is also shown.

And Pepe, with the best grace he had yet shown, hustled the water along and seemed to try to find opportunities to speak to Frank so as to have a chance to say "Meester Veldon" or "Yes, sir."

"I guess," said Frank, "that all he needed was to be shown who was boss. I suppose he thought that because he has a great, black whisker like a broom, while my face is almost smooth, it didn't matter much what he said to me." Then, laughing at his own version of the affair, he went below to breakfast.

My mind, however, was far from easy, and when I went below at eight bells I put in half an hour cleaning and loading a pair of navy revolvers which I had carried ever since I had been abate the mast. Frank and I had maintained a friendly

rivalry as to who should give the quickest relief, so that we had both acquired the habit of waking at eight bells before being called.

At 4 o'clock the next morning I woke as usual just as the helmsman commenced to strike the after bell. I jumped out of my bunk and reached the deck before the forward bell had finished striking. Seeing nothing of Frank, I jumped down on the main deck and began shouting for the starboard watch to "get along aft here," as was my custom. I ordered the wheel and lookout relieved and returned to the poop.

I waited, at first wonderingly and then anxiously, for my friend. At one bell I could stand it no longer. I took a look forward. The three men comprising the poop were seated on a spare spar in the bright moonlight. There was no sight nor sound of any other person about the decks. It was a beautiful night. The ship was running a couple of points free, the wind just ahead of the port beam. She had the three royals and jibtopsal on her, and was swinging along at an eight-knot gait.

I went down the after companion, and so through the cabin to the mate's room, and, as I feared, he was not there. Then I went and called the "old man." I told him in a few words as possible what I knew and what I feared.

"Why haven't I been told of this before?" said he. "Because," said I, "Mr. Weldon didn't think it necessary to bother you, I suppose, sir."

He asked me if I had a pistol. I told him I had two. "Get them," said he, "and come on deck with me."

Without a word to anybody, or to each other, we went down on the main deck and walked slowly forward, keeping our eyes about us, and I for one keeping my right hand on a revolver butt under my shirt. I noticed out of the tail of my eye that one of the watch had risen as if to follow us. "Go back," said I, and he seated himself again.

It was growing daylight, and I noticed the old man glancing aloft, but I kept my eyes on the corner of the house, and in the dark places by the water casks. We looked into the dim recess under the topgallant forecastle in search of what we hoped not to find and yet feared that we should find.

Passing round the fore hatch to leeward of the house, I noticed a wet place on the deck near the jibtopsal sheet pin, as though some one had been washing clothes there and had thrown two or three buckets of water about to wash away the tell-tale soap stains which Jack knows would betray to the mate the fact that he had been using fresh water.

We examined the spot by the dim light of the early dawn, and suddenly the old man said, pointing to some spatters on the bulwarks, as though a fine but powerful stream had sprayed on to it for an instant,—"This is the place."

Yes, that was the place. There were the marks of bloody fingers on the rail, and a nearby belaying pin was thickly smeared with the sickening fluid. In the darkness the murderer had not obliterated all the traces of his crime.

The old man went into the cabin for a moment, and when he returned I knew that he was armed, and I fancied that I could see in his face the features of the man who, in his day, had been a notable mate.

"Call the watch, Mr. Williams."

"Aye, aye, sir. Call the watch there! and lay aft, all hands."

"Call de rats, sir."

When they lined up in front of the break of the poop—the man Pepe brazenly in front—the Captain told them that he knew that they had murdered his mate, and called on them separately to deliver up the guilty man. My blood was boiling. I looked upon the whole lot of them with the disgust and contempt that I would have felt for the same number of filthy, starveling rats, and when Pepe, with his shifty eyes, glancing from side to side, answered like the rest, "Me no savvy, Cappy," I could stand it no longer.

Turning to the Captain in a frenzy of rage, with my fists clenched high above my head, I shouted: "By God, then, I savvy, Cappy, and I'll sho wyon the sneaking, cowardly round that killed him." Turning, I sprang from the break of the poop directly at the throat of the assassin, Pepe. My weight and momentum carried him off his feet, although he tried to dodge. Down we went in a heap on the deck, and it seemed as if the joy of a lifetime was compressed into the few seconds that I was raining blows on Pepe's ugly upturned face.

The Captain had quickly followed me to the main deck, and, with the assistance of some of the men, pulled me from my prey. Pepe scrambled to his feet, and ran forward yelling, accompanied by several of his shipmates. I wrenched myself free, out gun, and fired into the flying squad, rapidly thinning out before me as fast as they realized that Pepe's vicinity was unwholesome, while a yell or two gave me the gratifying intelligence that a dirty hide had kindly accepted my offering.

As they thinned out before me, like a dissolving view, I saw the object of my so-called scrambling up the lee fore rigging. I was within twenty feet of him. It was now daylight. He looked like an overgrown spider, as his squat form sprawled with wonderful alacrity up the lee rigging.

I fired again and again, but only once did he reward me with the unmistakable signal that I had hit him. He had just grasped the futtock shrouds, and I thought he was about to fall into the clew of the foremast, but he recovered himself and got into the top. I had four shots left. I darted to the weather side and went up as I never have gone before or since. It seemed as if I let go the sheer pole only to grasp the rim of the top. He had crossed to my side and was half way up the topmast rigging.

I stopped on the edge of the top long enough to fire two more shots, and like an automatic target he registered the one that hit. Again I was in pursuit. It couldn't last much longer, and I would be only too glad to grapple with him anywhere. I saw him stop over on to the topmast yard, and gave an inward grunt of satisfaction. It was to be settled on the yard-arm, then, that we were to settle it. Good; that suited me—but he started to slide down the jib stay just as I reached the yard.

I fired my last two shots point blank and missed. Then I hailed the deck and told them to let go the jib sheet. I wanted to shake him overboard, or, better yet, to dash him to pieces on the deck. But nobody obeyed, and, seeing him escaping me, I hurried my empty pistol at him and started down the stay in pursuit.

How he ever got down that stay I don't know. It must be true that the devil takes care of his own. But down he went anyway, and rushed aft to the old man, who clapped him in irons and fired him down in the lazarette. When I got down the stay as far as the sail I found myself

in a bad fix. I was unable to hold on, to go up, or continue on my way down, and at last my beamer fingers let go their hold. I rolled and bounded over the balloon-like surface of the big jib and dropped feet foremost, like a deep sea lead, over board.

Nobody had been paying any attention to me lately, so that when I came to the surface the ship, her spars leaning far out over me, loomed up big and black, and silent but for the wash of the water alongside and the roar of the wind under the lee clews of her courses. I struck out manfully for the main chains. My strength was nearly gone, but the old girl was deeply loaded, and as she took a lee lurch a friendly sea love me on to the lower channel. Here I hung on until I recovered my breath sufficiently to enable me to make my way inboard, where I was most heartily welcomed by the old man, who thought that the crew had taken advantage of his temporary absence with Pepe to send me after poor Frank.

I will not do the sturdy veteran the injustice to hint that he was frightened for a moment to find himself alone with his precious crew, but I do know that he was well satisfied at my return.

After that I wore my remaining revolves continually in plain sight, strapped about my waist with the old sheath-knife belt which I had worn when beneath the mast not so very long ago.

I never allowed my watch to come abate the mainmast in the night, but compelled them to stand out in plain sight on the deck, where I could count them every time I looked in their direction. The man on the lookout had orders to take such a course as would bring him into my field of view every time he turned to recross the deck, so then I knew where they were.

I hauled Pepe up out of the lazarette three times and flogged him to my heart's content. Then the old man locked him in a spare stateroom so that I couldn't get at him.

I found out who the man was who had the lookout at the time that Frank was murdered, and I tied him up by the toes until he confessed how the thing was done. Frank had set the jib topsail at five bells. Pepe had come to the halliards with his pipe in his mouth, and Frank told him to put it down. He pretended either not to hear or not to understand, so Frank snatched it out of his mouth and threw it overboard, whereat the rest of the watch pretended to laugh.

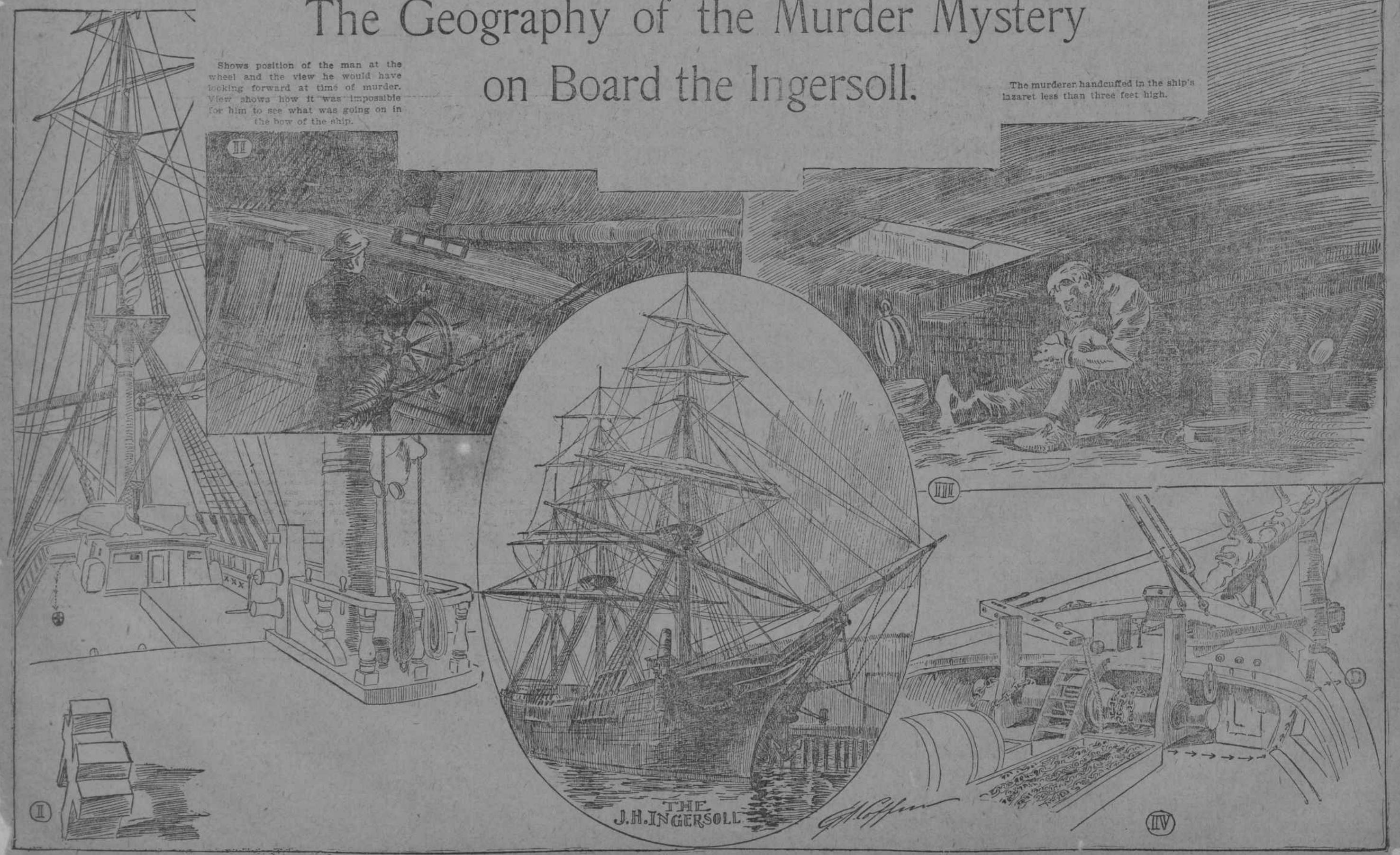
Shortly after Frank went aft Pepe sneaked forward and eased off the jib topsail sheet just enough to make it give an occasional flap. Frank, of course, came forward to see what the noise was, and, seeing Pepe leaning over the rail, he called him to take a pull on the sheet while he himself held turn. The lookout also helped. When Frank said "That'll do," the man on lookout turned and saw that just as he passed the last turn over the pin, Pepe sprang at him like a panther, lifted his left elbow and drove a long Sicilian knife clean through his heart, and without a word the poor fellow sank to the deck.

The lookout admitted that he assisted Pepe to throw the body overboard, adding, with a shrug, "He was dead."

The Consul at Rio locked Pepe in the city jail for safe keeping until such time as he should have the opportunity to send him to the States for trial, and we had the satisfaction before we left of hearing that he had escaped.

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The Geography of the Murder Mystery on Board the Ingersoll.



Shows position of the man at the wheel and the view he would have looking forward at time of murder. View shows how it was impossible for him to see what was going on in the bow of the ship.

The murderer handcuffed in the ship's lazaret less than three feet high.

THE SCENE OF THE MURDER—The cross shows where the mate was killed. Body fell down the steps to the deck and was then dragged as indicated by arrows and thrown overboard at B.

VIEW FROM THE QUARTERDECK—Three crosses on right side of deck show where the murderer was wounded three times by the brother of the murdered man.